

THE
Great Sin and Punishment

OF

17184
Preaching another Gospel,

Than that which has been preached;

Although it be by PERSONS of the
greatest and most pompous Titles:

Represented in a

S E R M O N.



By a DISSENTER.

L O N D O N :

Printed for JOHN NOON, at the *White
Hart, Cheapside, near the Poultry, 1755.*

(Price Sixpence.)

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GALATIANS i. 8.

But though we, or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

IN treating of these words, I purpose to do the following things :

1. Explain what it is to preach another gospel, than that which has been preached.

2. The anathema pronounced by the apostle against those guilty of it.

3. The manner of his expressing himself on this head, *But though we, or an angel from heaven.*

4. And lastly, make some observations on the whole.

I. I am to consider what it is to preach another gospel, than that which has been preached: And to comprehend the Apostle's meaning, it is necessary to read over this his epistle to the *Galatians*, which he addressed to them, that they might not be seduced by false doctors; for these last, although they had embraced the gospel, and made a profession of submitting to Christ, as their master, yet, in reality, did quite the contrary; for they taught that it was impossible to be justified without the works of the law; and that circumcision was absolutely necessary unto salvation. And these false teachers had maintained the very same things before, as appears by the following words; *and certain men, who came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and said, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved**. And with these false notions they caused a great noise and disturbance in the church; they perverted chiefly the *Galatians*, who had been led away by them, and persuaded that it was not sufficient to believe in Christ, and receive his gospel; but that the works of

* Acts. xv. 1.

the law and circumcision were of equal necessity: Such was that other gospel which some preached, and others received, in the apostle's time: And he most justly calls such doctrines another gospel, because it was quite different from, yea, absolutely contrary to, that of Christ; and to be convinced of this, let us only reflect what doctrine this last taught; namely, that all men were sinners before God, and therefore could never subsist before him, if he should enter in judgment with them. That it was impossible ever to procure that perfect righteousness required by God's law; that by consequence there was no other way of being saved, but by the death, and sufferings of Christ, and the fulfilling the conditions of faith and repentance; that all those ceremonies of the *Mosaic* law were abolished by Christ, especially circumcision; baptism succeeding in its place; and that therefore it ought by no means to be retained: But what was that other gospel preached by these false doctors? why absolutely inconsistent with the doctrines before mentioned. This the apostle proves beyond exception, in this his epistle to the *Galatians*.

I. As to their pretension of the necessity of being justified by the works of the law, he shews, at large, its absolute impossibility, and inconsistency with the gospels doctrine. *For as many, says he, that are of the works of the law; that is, who pretend to be justified before God, by their observation, are under the curse: For it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them* *. *But that no man is justified by the law, in the sight of God, is evident, for the just shall live by faith* †. *And the law is not of faith; but the man that doeth them, shall live in them* ‡. And after he had proved these things, he declared unto them, that *Christ had redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us* §. But that if men could be justified by the works of the law, in vain would our Saviour have attempted our deliverance. There was no need of this; *for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain* ||. And he declares, that *he was become of no effect unto those, who pretended to be justifi-*

* Galatians iii. 10. † Ibid. 11. ‡ Ibid. 12.
§ Ibid. 13. || Galatians ii. 21.

fied by the law; but that they were fallen from grace.*

II. And as for their other error; *viz.* the necessity of circumcision, in order to be saved, he tells them, that whosoever submitted to this rite, received not the least advantage from the gospel of Christ. *Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing †; for I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law ‡.* So that it is plain, that these false doctors taught what was absolutely incompatible with the doctrine of Christ; they would join together things contrary in their very nature; and therefore they were justly charged by the apostle with preaching another gospel; and perverting that of Christ. And he severely reprimanded the *Galatians* for suffering themselves to be thus seduced. *O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth §.* And he considered their condition as so very deplorable, in this respect, that he did all that laid in his power, to bring them back

* Galatians v. 4.
§ Galatians iii. 1.

† Gal. v. 2.

‡ Ibid. 3.

to the purity of the gospel. *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you* * : But if he was so very angry with them for suffering themselves to be thus imposed upon, how much more was he with their seducers, who thus perverted the gospel of Christ? He pronounces a dreadful anathema against them; *but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*; which terrible sentence, against false teachers in general, I am now going, secondly, to consider; and, at the same time, prove its justice.

The word accursed, signifies properly, in the original, a thing devoted to ruin and destruction; and therefore, when the apostle pronounces this dreadful sentence against seducers, in matters of religion, he declares them to be under God's curse, the objects of his anger; and that, without repentance, they cannot avoid feeling its most terrible effects; and he exhorts, at the same time, true Christians to take the greatest precautions not to be seduced by these false doctors; but we must here

* Galatians iv. 19.

very carefully observe, that the apostle does by no means dispense with these common laws of justice and charity, incumbent on all men. We must never, like those of the church of *Rome*, persecute and massacre those who differ from us in religious matters, even though they were teachers of the greatest absurdities; we ought never to injure them in the least, much less break our solemn promises to them; but, on the contrary, religiously perform them. We must only sincerely tell them our mind, try to convince them of the danger of their errors; and that so far from thinking their condition advantageous, we esteem it, on the contrary, very deplorable. In one word, we must, after we shall have done what we think our duty, leave them to God's righteous judgment, who will not fail severely to punish those who corrupt the purity and simplicity of his Son's gospel; since such a dreadful curse is pronounced against them by the apostle in our text.

And though it is very shocking and terrible, yet it is very just; and this will evidently appear, if we consider of what crime those are guilty, who preach another

ther gospel, and thus pervert the doctrine of our Lord and Saviour.

For, first, they sin both against God and Christ, to the highest degree; and accuse them of not knowing what was fit and necessary unto salvation; and even, what is worse, of contradicting themselves: For if what these false doctors taught in the apostles time was true, it was the greatest contradiction to what was revealed by Christ, and his ministers: And as these seducers, no doubt, pretended to confirm what they asserted by God's word; therefore, of course, either what they, or the apostles, affirmed concerning justification and circumcision, must be false.—And, was not this charging the apostles with imposing on Christians, and teaching them pernicious doctrines. Besides, had not the gospel God for its author? had he not sent his Son Jesus Christ to declare, and that in the clearest manner, the terms of salvation? which he had also often done, whilst on earth; and, after his resurrection, did he not give commission to his apostles still to explain them more at large? And that persons might not in the least suspect the truth of what they affirmed on this head, he confirmed their testimony

testimony by several proofs, against which there could be no reasonable exception. Now, such being the case, was it not the greatest arrogance to profess believing this gospel, preached by the apostles ; and yet, at the same time, destroy it by their false assertions ? Was it not informing others, that they knew much better than Christ, and his apostles, what was necessary unto salvation ; and that what these last taught, could never lead men to it, unless they also observed the law of *Moses* ? What an insult to God and Christ, to thus pervert the gospel, the most excellent, perfect, doctrine that ever was ! tending only to God's glory, and the happiness of mankind : And yet these false doctors would annul its efficacy, and render it of no service to their fellow-creatures ; yea, rather very pernicious and destructive : And therefore did they not most justly deserve that dreadful anathema, pronounced by the apostle in our text, where he said, *but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that we have preached, let him be accursed ?*

But, 2. This sentence pronounced against them, will still further appear equitable, if we reflect on the great mischief they
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did by thus preaching another gospel. They seduced numbers of persons, and perverted them from the right way; especially the *Galatians*, as it plainly appears from the many severe reproaches of the apostle unto them, for suffering themselves to be thus seduced. Now, what a crime was it thus to impose on those who had embraced christianity? Was it not leading them out of the right way into a wrong and pernicious one? Was it not to destroy, by their false assertions, those for whom Christ was dead? And therefore they justly incurred the displeasure both of God and of Christ, who whilst on earth had pronounced woe against those who shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, and *neither went in themselves, nor suffered those that were entering, to go in* *. But the apostle (so great was his regard for the gospel purity) does not only pronounce an anathema against these false teachers, but, at the same time, also against any person whatsoever, that would preach a gospel different from theirs, even if it was an apostle, yea an angel from heaven; *but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you,*

than

* Matt. xxiii. 13.

than that we have preached, let him be accursed; which manner of his expressing himself on this subject, I proceed to consider;

3. The apostle does not say in general, if any one preach unto you any other gospel than that we have preached; let him be accursed; but, by a very grand and lofty expression, if we, or an angel from heaven, were to do it; let them undergo the very same sentence. By this word *we*, we may well understand the apostle Paul himself, who had preached the gospel to the *Galatians*, and had converted them to christianity; or, what appears yet more just, all the other apostles; for by anathematizing all in general, without any exception who would corrupt the gospel's purity, he shews us much more evidently how sacred and inviolable it ought to be regarded, than if he had pronounced this sentence against some particular persons. But he does not confine himself to the apostles only. He subjects to this sentence, even the good angels, that would any ways corrupt the gospel: For without doubt, we must understand by an angel from heaven, in our text, an angel of light; the wicked one never being called by this name in scrip-

ture. But what, will it here be said, Was it possible for the apostles, or the angels from heaven, to corrupt the gospel of Christ? No certainly, this could not be; for so far were the first from being willing to do it, that, on the contrary, they were always ready to shed their blood for its defence; besides, being influenced by the Holy Ghost, they were infallible. These last, on the other hand, who are in heaven, can no ways be guilty of this crime, since they love God and Christ to such a degree, as to be incapable of such a deed. But the apostle confirms much better, by this supposition of an impossibility, the certainty of his anathema against those false doctors, who would corrupt the gospel's purity, and much more convinces us of the great and sacred regard we ought to have for it; for thereby he entirely overthrows all those false pretexts, which those that would corrupt Christ's doctrine might alledge, as that they have received from the apostles what they propose, or been taught it by an angel from heaven; it would, I say, be useless to ground themselves upon such reasons as these; to persuade others into the belief of what they advance, after this sentence of anathema, pronounced by the apostle, not only
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against all his brethren, but even the very angels, supposing they would any ways corrupt the gospel of Christ. It is not then without the greatest reason that the apostle, to shew us what a sacred regard ought to be had for the purity of the gospel's doctrine, says in our text; *but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.* Which very sentence (so great was his zeal in this respect) he repeats again in the following verse, *As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*

But I now proceed, 4thly and lastly, to make some important observations on what has been said.

And, 1st. If the apostle pronounces an anathema against false doctors, who pretended, in his days, to be justified before God, by the works of the law, and that circumcision was necessary unto salvation, what would he say if, living in our time, he saw persons maintaining their being absolved by the merit of their works, and pretending even to perform those of super

pererogation? What would he not pronounce against those whom he perceived guilty of the grossest idolatry; prostrating themselves before wood and stone; yea, even adoring a simple bit of bread, which they consider as their God; performing again their service in an unknown tongue, and denying to persons the use of the cup at the Lord's table? Why, he would, no doubt, thunder against them the sentence in our text, and look upon them as guilty of the greatest abominations. But what is more surprising still, those very persons, the abettors of such impious tenets, I mean the popes, cardinals, bishops, and archbishops, of the church of *Rome*, pronounce themselves an anathema against all those that will not receive these false doctrines, who will not worship the Virgin *Mary*, and saints, against those, again, that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, under both kinds: In one word, they that will not acquiesce in their determinations on religious matters, are pronounced accursed by the council of *Trent*. But what can be more absurd and insolent, than such a conduct? For the apostle in our text, and several other places, expressly condemns those errors which they will have persons to believe, under pain of an

an anathema. As for ourselves, let us not at all mind their threatnings and curses. Would to God it had been nothing else. Let us compare our religion with theirs; and observe which of the two agrees best with God's word. If we do, we shall perceive that it is against their false doctrines that the apostle pronounces this anathema. When then we are convinced beyond exception, that they are idolaters, worshipping and serving the creatures more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever; especially the mother of Christ, whom they call *Mother of mercy and grace, Queen of heaven, Hope of the world, and Refuge of the oppressed*; and whom they entreat to protect them from their enemy, and reserve them at the hour of death, should we not consider them as guilty of the greatest blasphemy? And do they not act directly against these words of *Isaiah*, *I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, nor my praise to graven images* *? When they forbid the use of the cup to the laity, violate they not this express commandment of our Lord, *Drink ye all of it* †? When they refuse persons the liberty of reading God's holy word, go they not directly

* *Isaiah* xlii. 8.† *Matt.* xxvi. 27.

against these words of our blessed Saviour,
** Search the scriptures?* When they perform again their service in an unknown tongue, is it not contrary to these words of the apostle, *What if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also †.* And further, *Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue ‡?* When they besides affirm, that the pope is the head of the church, what can be more opposite than this to these words of scripture, *And Christ is the head of the body of the church ||?* When, lastly, they overburden religion with a multitude of foolish and vain ceremonies, which they maintain must be carefully observed, since the church has expressly ordered it, do they not act contrary to these words of Christ, *God is a spirit, and they who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth §?* By all which then we may evidently perceive, that they have preached another gospel

* John v. 39. † 1 Cor. xiv. 14, 15. ‡ Ibid. 19. || Ephes. i. 22, 23. § John iv. 24.

than

than what the apostles have, yea, quite different from theirs ; for light and darkness cannot be more opposite to each other, than the doctrine of the church of *Rome* is to that of Christ, contained in scripture. In one word, they have entirely perverted the gospel of our blessed Saviour, and that much more than those false teachers against whom the apostle writes in that epistle where our text is contained. These last maintained but few errors, in comparison of those of the church of *Rome* ; nevertheless, they were severely reprimanded for it by the apostle, who pronounces an anathema against them. But what would he do in our days, if he saw persons professing themselves Christians, and to have a great regard for the gospel, who nevertheless had corrupted it to the supreme degree, and made it infinitely more absurd and ridiculous than any religion that ever existed ? What zeal and indignation would he not testify against them for preaching another gospel than what he had formerly dispensed, since he was so very angry against false teachers in his days, for perverting the doctrine of his Blessed Master, and seducing so many persons from the purity and simplicity of the gospel.

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The second observation which I shall make upon the words of my text is, that not any great or pompous titles can have any authority in matters of religion, and that Christians are not bound to pay any deference to them; and indeed most justly, for the belief that the greater mens titles were, the greater also was their authority in religious matters, has been the cause of all the mischief that has been done to the doctrine of the gospel, both amongst papists and protestants. Amongst the first, the popes, councils, cardinals, bishops, and archbishops, have claimed a very great power over mens consciences. They have pretended that great regard ought to be paid to their titles, that because they were the heads of the church, and much superior in dignity to the laity, therefore they were bound to receive, with a most profound respect, their decrees. But I will not dissemble, that the chief ground of their power in religious matters, is their so much boasted infallibility. And certainly, if they are vested with this eminent privilege, all their consequences are just, and every person is obliged to submit himself to, and receive their decisions, as oracles of the Holy Ghost. But that

that all this is nothing but arrogance, and falshood, is very manifest; for as they have published another gospel, than that preached by the apostles, their pretended authority over mankind, as to religion, is null. And though they say a pope, or a council composed of cardinals, bishops, and archbishops, have decreed these things, we may well answer them, that they are false, contrary to God's word; and that if the apostles had preached any such thing, they would have been accursed; or if in our days an angel was to come from heaven, and teach them, we should pay him no regard, but consider him as a seducer, and impostor. Thus much for those of the church of *Rome*.

And as for the protestant clergy, without exception, and of every denomination, they have but too well imitated the *Romans* in this respect; for they have met together about religion; there have been assemblies of divines, convocations, synods; and there are still many among them; and they all pretended to have power in affairs of religion; that their decrees ought to be received; and those punished, that would not submit to them: And pray what was the foundation upon which they grounded

such claims? Why, that they were superior to others in religious matters, and vested with the greatest titles, as bishops, archbishops, professors, and doctors of divinity, who had studied all these things for many years; and therefore knew much better what was necessary, in matters of religion: And the laity, it must be confessed, have been but too much imposed upon by all these eminents; they have received their decisions, as oracles, because they came from assemblies of divines, from fathers, synods, convocations, or, lastly, from grave doctors of divinity: But what has been the consequence? why, the right of private judgment taken away, or at least greatly lessened; and many errors, and superstitions, invented, and decreed; for there has seldom been any meeting of divines about religious matters, which have not done much more harm than good to Christianity, as they have been composed of fallible men; so they have also erred, if not by chance, in their doctrine; yet, at least (and this is worst of all) in pretending that persons should submit to their determinations. — But the words of my text are a dreadful and fatal blow to all such pretensions. And we may well say to such persons, if the apostles themselves,

selves, yea, or an angel from heaven, were to teach what you do, we would pay them no regard; we acknowledge them, and them only, for our masters, in affairs of religion; we will call *no man master, or doctor, on earth, for one is our master and doctor, namely Christ **; and if any of them were so haughty, and arrogant, as to pronounce an anathema against us, for this cause, and censure us as scismaticks, and obstinate persons, for refusing to submit ourselves to our superiors, we might well answer them, *there is but one law-giver, able to save and destroy; who art thou that judgest another †?*

The third and last observation on the words of our text is, that there is a sure and infallible way of knowing when a person preaches another gospel, than the apostles preached; *viz.* the reading God's word; And this is evident from the apostle's saying, *but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that we have preached, let him be accursed*; for thereby he gives plainly to understand, that it might be known, when this should happen; and how could

* Matt. xxiii. 8.

† James iv. 12.

this

this be, but by comparing it with scripture: the apostle himself, yea, an angel from heaven, was to be tried by it. There is no doubt, but at the time of his writing this epistle, some considerable part of the New Testament was committed to writing: Besides, the gospel had already been preached, and the terms of it fixed, by Christ, and his apostles: They were then to be judged by what had already been taught, and written; but there was, moreover, the Old Testament, that was their judge. They also appealed to it for the proof of what they advanced; and therefore some that heard them, resolved to examine what they taught, according to this rule; and this happened in particular to the apostle *Paul*, for preaching the gospel at *Berea*, the *Jews*, its inhabitants, would not take his word for the truth of what he advanced, *but searched the Scriptures, to know whether the things he said were so* §. There was then a certain rule in those times, to know what was agreeable, or not, to the gospel; viz. God's word. This was *proper to instruct, correct, and convince*; and since the apostles submitted themselves to be

§ Acts xviii. 11.

judged

judged by it, it is evident that they considered it as the supreme arbiter of all controversies about religion; for if there was no certain rule, at that time, about these things, there could have been nothing but confusion. Suppose any person should have accused the apostle of preaching things contrary to the gospel of Christ, how could this have been known, and determined, but by reading what had been revealed concerning it; and therefore, when the apostle says in our text, *But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that we have preached*, it is plain, that it was easy to discover what was, and was not, the gospel of Christ. Now, if the apostles themselves appeal to God's word, and desired, that what they advanced might be examined by it, and that only which was founded on Scripture received; and, if it did not agree with it, rejected, although they were apostles, how much more are synods, convocations, fathers, assemblies of divines, doctors, and professors of divinity, to be tried by this rule; and that by every man's private judgment. Though, to speak plain, since things are already clearly revealed in Scripture, there is no necessity at all that any persons whatsoever should

should meet, to determine matters of faith, or worship. This should be left to every person's own private judgment; but if, notwithstanding all this, the clergy of any denomination will assemble, to meddle about what is already expressly revealed, let them take heed unto themselves, to the law, and testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. And if there is none when they act thus, as it has but too frequently happened, they are certainly very improper persons to guide others in affairs of religion; which are, doubtless, of the greatest consequence.

Having thus finished the four general heads of my text, I shall conclude with applying what has now been delivered.

And, first, the words of our text are a powerful motive to excite the ministers of the gospel faithfully to acquit themselves in their duty, and never to preach any other gospel than that already preached; and for this end, they ought seriously to read God's word, submit to it as their sole guide, and make the greatest efforts, of

† Isaiah viii. 20.

which

which they are capable, to comprehend its true sense; and for this purpose often to reflect on that dreadful sentence, pronounced by the apostle in our text, against false teachers. They ought to take the greatest care not to be governed by pride, and never lord it over the Lord's heritage, because they instruct others; let them always declare to their hearers, that they are but fallible men, willing, and desirous, of having their doctrine examined by God's word. Let then the desire of applause, or making a party, never incite them to preach any thing opposite to the gospel; nor let them expect that it should be received with submission by their hearers; on the contrary, let them be humble, and intreat those committed to their care, *to prove all things by Scripture, and hold fast that which is good* *.

II. What powerful inducements are also the words of our text, to excite Christians to examine, and compare, the doctrine taught them by, and with scripture; for the great affair of salvation is of such importance, that persons can never too carefully examine any thing that concerns

* 1 Thes. v. 21.

it; they ought then never implicitly to receive what those, who, from their very infancy, have studied to teach them, how learned soever they be, and adorned with the most pompous titles, let them well fix in their minds, that the apostles only have been infallible. We intreat you then to follow the noble and prudent conduct of the *Bereans*, and, like them, examine, by Scripture, what the ministers of the gospel teach you; for if you attentively read it, you may discover, as well as those that instruct you, what is necessary unto salvation; for God's word is so clear, both in faith and morals, that, as *David* says, *it makes wise the simple* †. Let us then all, without distinction, make it our rule, and our only one, and this will infallibly prevent our *being carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but, on the contrary, by speaking the truth in love, grow up into him in all things who is the head even Christ* ‡.

† Psalm xix. 7.

‡ Ephes. iv. 14, 15.